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MEMORIAL SERMON.

A

SERMON,

PREACHED IN

THE FIRST CHURCH, ESSEX,

FEBRUARY 22, 1863,

BY

REV. JAMES M. BACON.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

BOSTON:
SAM'L CHISM,—FRANKLIN PRINTING HOUSE,
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"Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke." — Ezekiel xxiv. 16.

Strange announcement! The prophet himself is to be smitten! He who had been called to proclaim with prophetic foresight the blow impending over his guilty people, must now himself, in the purpose of God, enter into those most bitter of all experiences of life — death in one's own family — to make him and his a sign the more striking, and, if possible, effective to the Jewish church and nation. The feelings of the prophet may be experienced by us; but no pen or tongue can fully describe them. There is no blow so stunning as an abrupt announcement of unwelcome tidings. This was a most unexpected calamity to him. It was reasonable that his backsliding people should feel the full weight of that doom which he had been called to predict to them; but what had he done, as an obedient servant of God, to occasion this dreaded purpose of heaven — this terrible bereavement.

His wife was very dear to him; for she is called "the desire of his eyes." And the very endearments of this union make one reluctant to acknowledge the uncertainty of its continuance, or to dwell upon the

thought of separation for a moment. He knew that she must die; that he also must die — that they must one day be separated; and that God, in his counsels, had determined which should be removed first. But it does not appear that there was anything in the state of his health, or her health, to warrant the conclusion that the parting-day was near at hand. The poet Young has said, that "all men think all men mortal but themselves;" and if there is any exception to this remark, it is in the thoughts of a man respecting his wife. If there are few who steadily contemplate their own death, there are fewer still, as it has been justly said, who look their wife's death steadily in the face.

The death, too, was to occur under the most painful circumstances. The strange intimation itself was aggravating; for it reminded him of her worth, as "the desire of his eyes." The allusion to her value — which he had felt a thousand times in the course of their union, and which he realized more fully than ever, now that the blessing was about to be removed — started the most tumultuous feelings within his bosom. She was to be removed suddenly from him; for the morning announcement was awfully realized to him before the shadows of evening had fully declined — "and at even my wife died." She was to be removed, not by the ordinary way of protracted disease, with the "soothing warnings of the sick bed;" but with a stroke — suddenly and instantly — "quick and sharp" — with one fell swoop of death's scythe. And what still further aggravated the announcement, was the certainty of the event as finally decreed. No remedies could reach the case; no influences

could prevent the result; no fastings and humiliations on the part of the prophet would avail to disannul the sentence; nothing but the genuine and instant repentance of that entire nation as a people — thus doing away with the necessity of such a sign — could have prevented it; and now even that was impossible; or, if possible, would have come too late.

Her loss, too, was unspeakable. Her intrinsic worth, as a good, and true, and loving woman, implied this. Her value to him, for all these qualities of mind and heart, for her prayers and counsels and sympathies, implied this. He was now in captivity in Babylon; among foreigners, and strangers, and masters; and what a comfort she must have been to him in such circumstances! What a solace — what a support by her sympathies and prayers, amid the reproaches and persecutions of the times, in his peculiar circumstances. Perhaps he had there but little congenial society and fewer friends to advise with; and she would then be more valuable to him as an adviser and prompter, when tempted to relax his energies and omit duty; when confronted by the enemies of God and pressed by opposition. The loss of such a friend was immense — it was heart-rending.

And then, after the announcement, how many things he would have been glad to have said to her which, for want of time or because of the pressure of emotion, must be left unsaid forever. It was natural, therefore, to look here for the out-bursting grief of nature — the hot, scalding tears from eyes unused to weep — the loud cries of lament, and groans expressive of his inward anguish.

And do we not in reality hear them?

No! not even this natural and innocent expression of grief is permitted to our prophet; the grief he cannot help feeling must not find utterance. This relief to pent-up grief, — as the emission of steam from the surcharged boiler, to prevent an explosion — is positively denied him; the desire of his eyes must die unlamented, save deep down in his silent heart.

Even the customary habiliments and marks of mourning are forbidden him. He must make *no* mourning for her. He must still, as usual, "bind the tire of his head upon him," and not suffer his hair to float wildly in the air for her — he must put his shoes upon his feet, and not "walk softly and barefoot" for her — he must not for her "cover his lips," nor "eat the bread of men," or of mourners. All these and other customary tokens of mourning he must refrain from. Hard as this was, yet harder still is the inhibition of tears — "thou shalt not mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down. Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead." Some might complain of him for omitting the customary tokens of mourning, and might accuse him of apathy and disrespect to his companion; for we are told that the omission of the customary tokens of mourning was regarded in the East as an insult to the dead. But such reproaches he could have endured, and the better endured, could he have been permitted to weep in secret places and relieve, by tears, his aching, bursting heart. He must not even remit the customary duties of his vocation as a prophet, "Speak unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord, God." He must tell them the import of the symbol, and preach the preaching that is bidden him. "So I

spake unto the people in the morning; and at evening my wife died. And I did in the morning as I was commanded."

But what was all this *for*, my hearers?

This striking providence, under these peculiar and trying circumstances was intended as a sign for the admonition and for the benefit of his people. It was not designed so much for his good as for their improvement. It was one of the last of that series of literal and symbolical warnings — and the most signal and impressive of all — by which the prophet, under the Most High, was to try to win and had labored to gain, the attention of his people to their duty and their danger, to hinder their downward career, and prevent, if possible, their ruin.

During the sickness of your pastor's wife, the Spirit of God called my attention to this signal passage. There were some coincidences between my case and that of the prophet, which led me to feel that these words were almost a veritable intimation of what the Lord was about to do with me and mine; "Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke." It is even so! The stroke came with almost no forewarning. Your pastor's consort was the victim for your altar; and it came to pass that in the *morning* "my wife died." And now I will attempt to do on this Lord's day morning, what, as it seems to me I am commanded, as your prophet, to do. Now that my worst fears have been realized, and God's will has been done, I have been led to consider whether this death and this passage in my experience have not some lessons for my people and this community, as well as for myself, and what those lessons are.

It does not become me so much to lift the veil of my heart and expose to view all the secret workings within over my calamity, or to give expression to my grief, as to gather up some of the lessons which God would impress upon us by this death and to indicate to whom it should be a sign.

Nor is it my province now to say all it is in my heart to say of her *worth* to me and to you. The portraiture drawn of her character by other hands saves me this duty — pleasing as it might be to myself and gratifying as I know it would be to you.

I. This stroke is, in the first place, as it seems to me, *a sign to your pastor.*

In this respect the intention of this death seems different from that of the symbolical warning we have just contemplated. That can scarcely be said to have been intended for the prophet at all — only so far forth as he may have needed quickening in all holy sentiments and feelings as a preparation for duty and for his own death. But this death is primarily and specially intended for my own spiritual benefit and usefulness; and for your good *through* me, as well as directly. Indeed, the affliction of the prophet and my own affliction are both signs to me. Indulge me if, on this most peculiar and affecting occasion to me, I attempt to show in what respects.

1. The conduct of the prophet before us is an intimation to me, first of all, of the *spirit with which I should bear this calamity.* The prophet's was a *double* grief — personal grief at his own irreparable loss, and grief over that sin and waywardness in his people which occasioned the sign. All this, as we have

seen, was aggravated by the inhibition not to express his sorrow either in the form of tears or badges and customs of mourning. And what did he say to all this? Not a word of repining — not a murmur — not a sigh of regret escaped him. And what did he do? He submitted to it as a necessary sign in the fulfilment of God's purposes, and nerved his mind with a holy fortitude to his public duty in telling the people all of this strange and solemn matter which it was needful for them to understand. And what next? He shall answer for himself — "in the evening my wife died." How did he carry himself then? "And I did in the morning as I was commanded." This, as it has been said by another, reaches the very summit of moral grandeur. It was a spirit truly sublime — yea, more than heroic, even Christ-like in its full and unquestioned submission. Like a more ancient patriarch, "in all this he sinned not nor charged God foolishly;" and in effect said, "Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord and shall we not receive evil also?" * * "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord." In the full conviction that the end of this sign was wise and good, and that, therefore, the affliction itself was not needless nor sent in anger, but in love and mercy — in the firm persuasion that good would come of it, and that God would sustain him under it, like Aaron of old, he "held his peace." He more than submitted to it — he fully acquiesced in it; and then did all in his power to fulfil its design, and to make it fruitful to his people.

It becomes your servant and pastor to do likewise. I have the same reasons for submission that did the

prophet. The infliction was needed, or it would not have been sent at this time — needful to myself, needful to my people. In all this routine of ministerial and pastoral labor there are strong tendencies to a dead formality, which need frequently to be corrected. The worth of souls is not fully realized, and corresponding earnestness in prayer and preaching to save them is in some measure remitted. Strong temptations to withhold the whole truth, or to neglect its application to men's consciences, are more readily yielded to; the desire to please may become more potent than the desire to save; worldliness takes the place of spiritual-mindedness, and negligence of earnestness. The corrective of all these tendencies is affliction — tribulation. Prosperity *here* deadens devotion, and makes us remiss in Christian duty. In this world of sin and discipline, then, it is not safe for us to be long without some sorrow. "Every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit." Our very well-being and usefulness necessitates some kind of pruning and taking down; and sometimes that pruning which is the closest and most severe is the most effective in producing fruitfulness. Only three weeks ago tomorrow, I repeated to my wife the following saying of John Newton, that "whenever the Lord wanted to pull him down, the trial was sure to come through his wife." She was afflicted for his good. And I made the remark in this connection, that perhaps the Lord intended by her infirmities *my* good, and to take *me* down. She replied, in the goodness of her heart, "Oh no; it is for my own good and for me rather than for you." *She* said, No; but God by this solemn, sudden

stroke has most emphatically said to me yes! The event has proved that it was for my good, rather than for her good — for my correction and instruction in righteousness. I should not only submit to this providence as an act of Divine sovereignty — in doing that which he had a right to do with *his own*, and in taking away that which he at first gave: I should not only submit to it in the firm persuasion that he laid upon me this burden not needlessly, but for wise ends; but I should also acquiesce in it, as that which is intended for the benefit of myself and people — as a needful pruning, to my own increased usefulness — as the appointed means of bringing the wanderer home — as the means which, under the controlling grace of his Spirit, may try my hopes, purify my heart, sanctify others around me, and bring sinners to the cross.

In the spirit of unquestioning submission, of full acquiescence, of humility, and unfeigned, unselfish love, may I receive this chastisement!

2. And this leads me to remark, that it is a sign to me, also, *of the law of self-sacrifice — of self-devotion for the sake of others.*

Self-sacrifice — voluntary suffering for the good of others — this is the universal law which crosses the track of every mortal in this social, dependent state. The Son of God voluntarily submitted to it. "For their sakes I sanctify [i. e., consecrate or devote] myself." The apostle Paul offered himself upon the sacrifice and service of his converts' faith. And the prophet before us — in submitting thus fully, in acquiescing thus cheerfully, to a dispensation that was

to deprive him of the desire of his eyes and rive his heart with anguish, for the sake of the people's good and God's glory, offered himself upon the sacrifice and service — not, it is true, of the people's faith; for they had no faith, but, at least, of the people's highest well-being and happiness, which he sought, as it has been well remarked, with a constancy and disinterestedness unknown to themselves. Here, then, the prophet may well be, and is worthy to be, my teacher. With a spirit of self-denial and devotion which exalts him to a place among ancient Christian worthies, he voluntarily offered his own wife, as it were, a sacrifice to the people's well-being. An intimation this to me that I also ought to be willing to part with my dearest earthly friend for the sake of my people's good and to save souls here from death. If in *this* sense her death shall prove vicarious, I ought most surely to rejoice in it — when, at the same time, we have such abundant evidence that my loss is her eternal gain. If her dear infant charge in the Sabbath school, — if the youth in her sewing-circle, — if the young ladies in this congregation who have in her such a bright example of early piety and youthful consecration, — if the mothers in this parish who find in her such a high type of maternal influence and faithfulness, — if others who have witnessed in her the bland influences of a growing piety and the value of vital godliness; shall be led by her death, more than by her life, to conviction, for personal guilt, and faith in Christ and a like consecration, and to live for the good of man and the glory of God, — then surely your pastor, who has been professedly laboring from the first for these very ends, in the ex-

ercise of the same lofty spirit of consecration to the work of God, witnessed in our prophet, should willingly lay even his bosom companion — "the desire of his eyes" — on this altar, a sacrifice to the people's highest well-being! And if I do so with the same disinterested submission and cheerfulness, I shall be accepted "according to what a man hath," and God will "take the will for the deed," whatever improvement or misimprovement my people make of this affliction. "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord." I pray that I may not be so swallowed up with personal grief, as to forget these high considerations.

3. The prophet's carriage, under his affliction, is an example to me, also, *of constancy and faithfulness in the discharge of my public duties;* and my own affliction, likewise, is an *admonition* to the same.

We find Ezekiel faithfully standing at the post of duty, delivering to the people the message he had received from the Lord, on the very morning of the day his wife died, and after he had received the startling premonition of her fate. "So I spake unto the people in the morning, and at even my wife died." Notwithstanding the intervening hours were so precious to him, and he must have longed to have been by her side every moment till her change came — showing the last affectionate tokens of conjugal fidelity, and saying the last things, and receiving her last farewells — yet, at the call of duty, he denied himself these personal gratifications, breasted the storm of personal grief, and stood forth promptly before the people with the same constancy in service

and fidelity in duty as ever. What "a lofty spirit of consecration to the work of God!" With such a spirit, how prompt, how unshrinking, how constant, how faithful should we be in Christian duty, even at the expense of great personal sacrifices, of time, of money, of interest, and of feeling! What works of mercy, what enterprises of benevolence, should we not be willing to undertake! how much might we not accomplish in the cause of God and humanity! Pray for me, my people, that I may here also imitate the prophet, and imbibe largely of this spirit of Christian constancy and faithfulness.

I need not tell you that she whose loss I mourn, partook largely of this self-same spirit. When duty was made known to her, she "conferred not with flesh and blood." Personal infirmities were forgotten when any service for Christ and for souls was lying on her conscience. The voice which said, "Spare thyself," was hushed or drowned by the louder voice which said, "Go work to-day in my vineyard." I would remind myself of her constancy and perseverance in Christian labor; of her unsparing energy and unshrinking fidelity; and would be prompted, by all those incidents in her life which I have in mind, expressive of this spirit and evincing its possession, to a higher consecration, a more unsparing constancy and a truer fidelity, myself. And by this "stroke," which has now deprived me of her ever-present example, I would be prompted not to sow the seed, by my own remissness and negligence for "dying regrets — not by the presence, but rather by the absence of the same from her dying bed. No thorns had been planted in her pillow. No words of regret, that she

had devoted her energies so little to self and so much to the cause of Christ. She had endeavored to do something for Him who had done everything for her, and she had no regrets now that she had done so much — had there been anything to regret upon the review of life, it would doubtless have been that she had done so little. Her memory — here as a tract distributer, taking some hard district which all the other ladies in the parish had refused, and by her kind heart and gentle, winning grace, gaining access to homes from which others had turned away in despair, or to which they had been refused admission; and there, as a teacher of youth, laboring with an unsparing hand to reach the heart as well as to store the mind; or, as a Sabbath School teacher, ever laboring to reform and convert as well as to instruct; or as an agent, soliciting subscribers to some religious journal where others would despair of success; or as a Christian friend, laboring to remove the dark cloud of sorrow or of despair from some beclouded mind, and to bring impenitent friends to Christ with a perseverance which was sometimes crowned with success, — her memory, as an unshrinking, unsparing *doer of good*, is at once to me a fragrant balm, and a prompter to like earnest and persevering endeavor.

4. The prophet's loss and my own loss — the sudden and premature death of these two women, the one occurring twenty-four hundred years ago, and the other only a fortnight ago — are both a sign to me *that "the night cometh when no man can work."*

A few brief sentences of holy writ — less space than is taken up in recording some of the genealogies in

which we feel little interest — would have been very grateful to our feelings as indicating the character and state of the prophet's wife. But much is *implied.* It is implied that she was a *good* woman, a pious woman, — a true believer. It is implied that she had gracious affections and amiable qualities that made her a pleasing companion and true help-mate to this man of God. It is implied, also, that she was a useful woman; for such affections and qualities make every wife more or less useful; and, as the wife of a prophet, with grace and a loving heart she would be, from position and circumstances, still more useful. *How* useful she was it is not said, nor even implied. But her usefulness was now cut short. Her helpfulness to the prophet must now cease, only so far as the remembrance of her may be useful to him. Her term of service in the vineyard of her Lord and Master now suddenly ends. Her working days are over. Thus, also, is it with her whose usefulness we better knew, — whose loss we all so deeply deplore. Her work on earth is finished. How often has it been remarked to me, "She was cut off in the midst of her usefulness." She can do, actively, in her late relations to us, no more for me — no more for you and your children. She rests from her labors, and her works do follow her. Suddenly did she lay down the implements of labor; — her question-book and Bible in the Infant Department, her commission as a prophet's wife and Christian mother, and with a "stroke" has she been summoned from time into eternity. The Parsonage, consecrated by many a prayer from her, has now been consecrated by her death. She will suggest no more texts to the

pastor; she will no more offer her just criticisms on his public labors — for which service this people are greatly indebted to her fine taste; — she will no more prompt him with regard to public engagements, or pastoral duty; her mission is ended, for her work is done, her account sealed up, and her time of "rest" has come. Plans of labor that she had devised remain unfinished; for the Son of man came for her in an hour when we all looked not for him, and took her to those "mansions" where she might behold his "glory."

This sudden death emphasizes to me that startling admonition, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest."

"I know thou art gone where the forehead is starred
With the beauty that dwelt in thy soul;
Where the light of thy loveliness cannot be marred,
Nor thy heart be flung back from its goal.
I know thou hast drank of the Lethe, that flows
Through a land where they do not forget;
That sheds over memory only repose,
And takes from it only regret.
And though like a mourner that sits by a tomb,
I am wrapt in a mantle of care,
Yet the grief of my bosom — Oh call it not gloom,
Is not the black grief of despair.
By sorrow revealed, as the stars are by night,
Far off thy bright vision appears;
And hope, like the rainbow, a creature of light
Is born like the rainbow in tears."

II. Having thus far considered the affliction of the prophet, and his deportment under it in connection with my own bereavement, in their indications to

myself of present conduct and future duty, let me consider, also, what God would indicate by these solemn providences to you, for your own direction in conduct and duty.

This stroke is, in the second place, as it seems to me, *a sign to my people.* Even the symbolical warning in the text, although intended primarily as a sign to the Jewish people and nation, may have been recorded in the sacred canon for the reason that it might have, in the Divine intention, some significance as a sign to God's people in all after time; and therefore some intimations to you. It is, at least, suggestive of many important practical lessons; and when taken in connection with my late bereavement, and *your* bereavement, it may be regarded as a sign, in many particulars, to my people.

The sudden death of your pastor's wife is a sign, first of all, *to the married* — that these dearest earthly ties may be rudely sundered, and is therefore a warning to them to live together as they shall wish they had done, when they come to part.

Although a single life is a state that has "peculiar opportunities for deep blessedness," as is instanced in such lives as that of John the Baptist, the apostle Paul, and other examples of heroic Christian effort; yet the apostle himself, in comparing and contrasting the two, brings forward into strong relief the blessedness and advantages of the married state, and hallows and exalts it by making it a type of the union between Christ and his church. If the one state is the more angelic and brings forward such examples of godly living, and noble daring, and Christ-like action, as that witnessed in the examples before-

mentioned, the other is the more natural and human state, better fitted to develop the social virtues, and to draw out the whole of man's love, and to fit us "to enter into the daily cares and small difficulties of our ordinary humanity," — as one has well said, "and this has been represented to us by two great lives — one human, the other divine — one the life of John the Baptist, and the other of Jesus Christ." In both these cases is verified the saying, that "Wisdom is justified of her children." "Those who are wisdom's children, the truly wise, will recognize an even wisdom in both these lives; they will see that there are cases in which a solitary life is to be chosen for the sake of God, while there are other cases in which a social life becomes our bounden duty. But it should be specially observed here, that *that* life which has been given to us as a specimen of life for all, was a social, a human life. Christ did not refuse to mix with the common joys and common sorrows of humanity. He was present at the marriage feast, and by the bier of the widow's son. This, of the two lives, was the one which, because it was the most human, was the most divine; the most rare, the most difficult, the most natural — therefore the most Christ-like."*

The marriage state has its peculiar advantages, then. Therefore, let those in this relationship make the most of the domestic state in securing these advantages. Let them cultivate the higher social virtues. Let the married pair cultivate those affections and sympathies which will make them to each other "the desire of the eyes." Let them love truly and fully. Let them cultivate mutual esteem — mutual confi-

* Robertson.

dence — mutual regard for each other's society — mutual concern for each other's welfare, both temporal and spiritual, for time and for eternity. Let tender-heartedness and charity prevail. Let each esteem the other better than themselves, — in lowliness of mind — in honor preferring one another. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." "For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?" You have great opportunities — by example and influence; by mutual counsel, and forbearance, and love — to promote each other's highest social, spiritual, and eternal well-being. Therefore, improve these opportunities — secure these advantages — as you will wish you had done, when they come to be rudely sundered.

"But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth that both they that have wives be as though they had none; * * * for the fashion of this world passeth away." And this reminds me that this death is *a sign of the approaching end of those who are at present in these endeared relations.* It is an intimation that wives must die — that husbands must die — that you, who are "the desire" of *some* eyes, may be unexpectedly cut down with a stroke — that from the midst of your domestic cares, in the very noon-tide of life, and from the summit of domestic affection and happiness and height of usefulness, you may be summoned into eternity.

Little did I think that the life of one who was the desire of *my* eyes, would so abruptly and suddenly terminate. It is even so. "Death loves a shining mark;" and he has taken sure aim and had his own

will. It *is* a warning to the married — it was meant to be so. It is a sign to them that such relations — however desirable, however necessary, however useful, must cease. It is a sign to all that each one must die *alone*. That dying companion could extend to me her hand, and those right hands could be clasped as they were originally clasped in sign of plighted faith and marriage vows, and we could accompany each other, hand in hand, down to the brink of that dark river; but *there* we had to part hands — and *forever!* The marriage tie was sundered — the human companionship was broken — the domestic relationship ceased forever! She must now ford death's "cold flood" *alone* — while I stood, also alone, shivering on its brink, repeating, over and over, my last sad farewells! This is a sign to you of many a similar scene which must occur in this congregation — in these families — in the course of time. Get ready for them. Let the marriage union be founded on the Christian union. Let each party become personally interested in Christ as a Saviour. Let human love be cemented by Divine love. Let each party live in expectation of the *end* — walk surely, live humbly, "die daily." And let them remember the motives which the apostle sets forth to the Corinthians, to urge them to form this union to Christ, and to live this holy, expectant life. "The time is short." The conjugal union, at the longest, is brief. "Golden weddings" are few and far between; and, even where they are permitted "by reason of strength," the union of fifty years is but "as yesterday when it is passed, and as a watch in the night." The years fly in rapid succession, like mile-posts on the track of the steam-car; and the old man who bends over the cof-

fin of the companion of his youth, is obliged to admit, "We have spent our married years as a tale that is told!"

Time is short, as it respects our stay here and our probation for eternity, and it is short as it respects our opportunities. The duties of to-day cannot be put off till tomorrow; for each day has its peculiar chances, its appropriate duties. The same chances, neglected, can never be recovered. Therefore be faithful, and therefore be watchful — prepare for Death, Judgment and Eternity.

Prepare for separations; "for the fashion [or the *scenery*] of this world passeth away." Our time, as a stream, flows swiftly away — our feelings change and our occupations change — and our relations change, — life's beauties fade away —natural scenery and natural boundaries change — everything here below is passing away. The marriage state has its uses — those answered, "the fashion of this world passeth away." "It remaineth, therefore, that they that have wives be as though they had none." Let them prepare to see them taken from their side — let them prepare for their own approaching end. "Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life and in thy labor which thou takest under the sun:" — but remember, withal, to hold all the good things thou hast from God, "in the perpetual conviction that they will not last:" and, remember, that thou, too, must die!

3. The conduct of the prophet, when submitting

to the loss of his companion, as a symbolical warning for the sake of the Jews, is an intimation to my people — as well as to myself — how *they* should endure afflictions.

I have a better man than myself to set before my flock as an example of suffering affliction and of patience. The prophet shall here be your teacher, as well as my own. See him, as he stands forth on this moral elevation. What patience in enduring the ills of life, and especially in suffering that stern and terrible necessity, which the very sin and obstinacy of his people occasioned! What submission to the will of God when called upon to lay such a costly sacrifice upon the altar for his people's good! What resignation to the painful necessity of taking up that cross which, it has been well said, is the heaviest that man was ever called to bear! But he did it — more than submissively; he even acquiesced in the dispensation; and made God's will his will — so obediently and fully, that when forbidden to put on mourning, he refrained from it; yea, when commanded neither to mourn nor weep, and not to give any outward sign or audible expression to the deep grief and inward anguish which, like smouldering fires, was working and heaving in his heart-smitten bosom, he obeyed so fully, that not a sigh escaped, not a tear fell! Here was not only submission — here was the fruit of full piety; of implicit confidence in the Divine integrity and goodness; of a deep and reverential love under severe schooling. "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth — because Thou didst it." It is true that He who mingled the bitter draught, gave him grace and strength

to drink it. He who, through his parents, gave him his name, Ezekiel — "supported of God," or "God is my strength" — faithful to the intimation, *was* the strength and support of his servant in this time of need. And so he will be your support, afflicted hearer. He does not, as in the case before us, forbid thy tears — this natural and wholesome expression of inward grief over the loss of friends or fortune. He does not inhibit these badges of mourning which I see in the house of God today. He is pleased with all that respect for the dead which honors departed worth — real goodness — an honorable and a useful life. We may mourn over our dead, and express in all legitimate ways our sense of personal loss, if our sorrow is not so immoderate as to dishonor Him by unfitting us for the duties of life, or by exhibiting an unsubmissive and resentful spirit and charging God foolishly.

Let my people, then, copy after this instructive example, when God lays his afflicting hand upon them. Let them exhibit the same child-like, resigned, submissive spirit. Let them not so selfishly and so exclusively dwell upon their own personal "loss," as to overlook the "gain" of their pious dead. Even when, as in the prophet's case, all the circumstances of their removal are aggravating — such as their sudden and unexpected removal; with but little or no opportunity to exchange last words and hear last wishes; as their death when far from home and among strangers, where they could not receive the kind attentions which love would bestow in mitigation of their sufferings; as death by their own hands when deprived of reason, or death by the hand of

violence and malice, where the arrest and punishment of the murderer is no relief to the anguished heart, — still, let them not murmur at the mysterious ways of God; but say rather, in meek humility, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord." "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Let them seek out the cause for this personal affliction; and humble themselves for their sins, and improve the chastisement, to promote their more thorough reformation and reconciliation to God. Let them cease to do evil, and learn to do well. Let them perfect holiness in the fear of God, and seek to be brought more fully into sympathy with God's plans, and his ways, and his love.

"Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee:
Ev'n though it be a cross
That raiseth me,
Still all my song shall be,
Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee.

* * * * * * *

"There let the way appear
Steps up to heaven;
All that thou sendest me
In mercy given,
Angels to beckon me
Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee.

"Then with my waking thoughts,
Bright with thy praise,
Out of my stony griefs,
Bethel I 'll raise;
So by my woes to be
Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee."

4. This providence should prompt you, my people, *to be diligent and unshrinking in Christian labor.*

Delicacy forbids me to appeal to the example of one whose daily life was so fully under my eye that I could not but notice any indications of superior conduct in this direction, as illustrative of unobtrusive diligence and unshrinking self-denial. And yet, in justice to her memory and with the desire to make her life all that "sign" to my people which God by this afflictive dispensation may have designed, I will so far allude to her life as to show that she was a worthy example of diligence, perseverance, and self-forgetful energy, both in daily cares and Christian effort. She was never idle. To see her, as we were obliged to see her, for a few days before she was stricken down, with nothing in her hands, was an intimation that some infirmity beyond the ordinary embarrassments of life was preying upon her health and tying those hands. She was ever devising and executing something for the comfort and well-being of her family. But although "a keeper at home and loving the sanctuary of home," yet, she was inventive in her plans for doing good abroad. The Christmas tree was one of the fruits of such planning, and of her perseverance and diligence. But it is only one of the monuments she has left behind of her delight in doing good and earnestness in the same. Pleasant as was the prospect of sitting down with her afternoon work in her quiet home — loving, as she did, a stormy day, because we could then be all alone at home, and there would be no interruption and restraint to the quietude and even flow of domestic life and bliss — still, she was, perhaps, even then,

planning some visit to the sick and afflicted; or some gift to the poor; or some means of improving the young; or aiding mothers in their work through the maternal association; or writing a note to an impenitent friend; or preparing and planning the work for the next meeting of the benevolent society, or juvenile circle. And when the time appointed for her out-of-door mission came, she suffered no selfish pleadings to keep her at home. When absent from home, among friends, her heart was in her work here; and when the appointed hour for her return came, she suffered no earnest pleadings of friends to swerve her from her purpose, if health and other circumstances permitted her to return. She would reply to all their persuasions by saying, "My work is where my home is; and, although it is pleasant to stay with you, yet, we are needed at home, and have more than we can well do there."

But I forbear. I have trespassed upon the sanctities of domestic life too far. But I knew that these particulars would be interesting to you, and I felt, above all, that they would be useful. Follow her example, however, only so far as she followed Christ — as she walked uprightly — as she fulfilled what the demand of a pious and benevolent heart, and an enlightened conscience, and a disinterested but judicious spirit, would dictate as right and fit.

And let her premature death admonish you. It teaches that you may be summoned away with plans and purposes but partly matured and yet unexecuted. Let it lead you to work while it is called to-day, "for the night cometh when no man can work." Is there not something which you can do for the

advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom and the good of man which you have not undertaken? Can *you* not be fruitful in invention? and seek out opportunities to do good? and persevere in labors for the good of souls, under the inspiration of Christian love and hopefulness? Will you not be prompted to such labors by the hazards of life and the uncertainties of time? Will you not consecrate yourself anew to the work of God in the lofty spirit of self-denial and disinterestedness, under the impulses which come from the life, under the admonition which comes from the death, of one who has now ceased from her labors?

5. This death is an admonition to my people *to immediate repentance.*

In common with all deaths it is so. For death terminates our probation — cuts short our "space for repentance" — seals up our destiny. "As the tree falleth so it lieth." The character remains fixed in its goodness or in its badness — the destiny is determined for eternity. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still." As "no man knoweth his time," immediate repentance is most surely his interest, as it is also most certainly his duty.

The suddenness of this death should admonish you of this duty. The present time may be your *only* opportunity. Seasonable preparation is the best and ripest preparation. Where preparation has been early begun and watchfully prosecuted, sudden death is no alarming surprise. It may be doubted whether your

pastor's companion was aware of the near approach of death until the very hour in which she was stricken down. But for more than thirty years past she had been preparing for his approach; and when at length he did come, "the king of terrors" had no terrors for her. Her repentance had been sincere and deep; her faith, that which justifieth the ungodly; her hope sure and stedfast; and now she looked death calmly in the face; promptly delivered her dying counsels to her family; exchanged the last farewells; and in holy fortitude, and serene composure, and patient expectation, awaited her release.

"So fades a summer cloud away:
So sinks the gale when storms are o'er:
So gently shuts the eye of day:
So dies a wave along the shore."

Her life, as well as her death, is an intimation to the young of the advantages of *early* repentance — of godly sorrow for sin, and faith in Christ and conversion to God, *in youth.* She was a bright example, as you have been before told, of *early* as well as late piety. She remembered her Creator in the days of her youth. What an advantage is early repentance — what a blessing is youthful piety, when it thus prepares the way for so symmetrical and mature a character; lays broad and deep foundations for lasting peace and assurance of hope, and allays all the fears of nature and of conscious guilt, when suddenly "the grim messenger" cometh! May you, my youthful hearers, heed this admonition, and prove this advantage, by seeking at once an early interest in God's mercy.

6. And this reminds me that this death is a sign to you of *the peaceful and happy lot of the righteous.*

Her end was peace.

"I have seen persons far more sick than you are, Mrs. B., recover from such shocks, and enjoy comfortable health afterwards; what makes you think that you shall not live?" "Because," she replied, "of this dreadful pain around the heart and in my head. But it is all right." And then, after she had taken an affectionate leave of her family, "It must be very hard for you to part with your family." "O yes," she replied, "but then it is all right — all right." And when your pastor asked, "Is your trust sure and abiding?" She replied, "I hope it is." And then again, afterwards, when she was speechless, but conscious, "Is your hope still strong? if so, press my hand:" the muscles obeyed the will, and the answering pressure was given. Her work was done! Her record to the faithfulness of the divine promises, — of strength equal to the day, and grace for dying hours — was now made. Truly, peaceful is the end of the godly! The pains of dissolving nature may be intense; but the mind is calm, the spirit is peaceful, the soul is at rest.

> "Gently the passing spirit fled,
> Sustained by grace divine:
> Oh may such grace on us be shed,
> And make our end like thine."

Happy the lot of the righteous! Grace here — glory hereafter! They have within them "a well of water springing up into everlasting life." They "drink of the river of God's pleasure" here — they drink of the "pure river of water of life, clear as

crystal," and eat of the fruit "of the tree of life," there. "Her eyes had beheld the king in his beauty," here; and therefore her life on earth was beautiful, and feminine, meek and simple; and now that she no longer "sees through a glass darkly," but beholds Him "face to face," — reflecting back as from a burnished mirror, the glory of the Lord, she is "changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." She is a partaker of that ineffable splendor — a participator in that unspeakable blessedness — a sharer in that pure and perennial "joy." Let us behold here the beauty and glory of true piety — the value of experimental religion — the advantages of deep and growing devotion — the peace of a tried believer here, and when passing through the valley of the shadow of death, and the happiness of a saint there — where

> "Safely moor'd — her perils o'er,
> She sings, first in night's diadem,
> Forever and forevermore,
> The Star! — the Star of Bethlehem!"

7. Her life and her death, then, let me say to you, last of all, is a sign of *Christian consecration for the sake of others.*

It has been well said, that "the true law of every life is consecration to God." To this law every true Christian conforms, and thus he is an example of such consecration to others, and a sign of what the world around him ought to become, to fill the Divine idea of a man. As the Levite, sanctified and set apart to God's peculiar service, — to borrow this author's illustrations — was a sign of what the Jewish

people were meant to be and should have been; and as the Jewish nation, a consecrated and peculiar people, stood for what "the whole race of man is in the Divine idea — a thing whose proper life is perpetual consecration;" so the Christian believer stands for what every man ought to be, in the Divine idea. In this sense your departed friend was a sign to my people of what they should become, and an example to them of consecration according to this great law of life. Both as a Christian, and in her position as a minister's wife, her holiness was a *representative* holiness, — it represented, so far as she followed Christ, what is the Divine idea with respect to *every* life before me.

Her consecration, according to this law, was personal, voluntary, hearty, and entire. It began in early youth, it continued through a devoted and self-forgetful life — not faultless, like her Master's; but, nevertheless, true, sincere, earnest, self-denying, and evincing the spirit of that consecration, of which Christ was the highest type, and his life the completest and brightest example. She obeyed this law of consecration for *herself* — as a sinner, needing redemption; as a depraved sinner, needing sanctification; as a creature and beneficiary of Providence, dependent on God for life, health, and all the blessings of life, and all the offers of life eternal; and, therefore, under obligations to consecrate herself and all that she was or might become, to his service. And she obeyed this law of consecration *for the sake of others.*

Her early piety and her profession of faith in Christ, at the early age of eleven, was for the sake of

others, as well as for her own sake. It was so, doubtless, in her thought and purpose, as an example to her young friends; but, if not in her own thought, it was so in the purpose of God. It was designed in Providence, as both a reproof and an encouragement to the young. It was a representative act, significant of their own duty in this respect. She, then, in effect said to her young friends, and to the whole world, as her Master said upon one occasion, when about the same age, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" "The girl was then sanctifying herself for life and womanhood's work."* Her putting on Christ, then, was virtually and practically *for the sake of others*, as well as for her own sake. It prepared the way for a longer term of service in the cause of Christ, and a more faithful service with all the advantages of a deeper and longer experience; and hence, for more usefulness and greater good to others. This early consecration was the preparation for her work as a Sabbath school teacher; and, subsequently, as a teacher of youth in the common school, and afterwards in the academy.

To the same intent was that season of spiritual darkness, consequent upon a diseased state of the optic nerve, necessitating the abandonment of her studies at Bradford Academy. Those nights of unrest; those bitter wailings of despair, in secret places; those awful apprehensions that the Spirit of God had taken his final departure — that terrible trial of her faith and hope, continuing by turns for months, with

* "I professed" — to copy her own words from her journal, when writing of that act a few years afterwards — "to forsake the world and its fleeting pleasures, and to choose Jesus for my Saviour, my friend, my portion, my pattern, my all."

the abandonment of her hope for six weary years, was all in preparation for her future work, — especially as a pastor's wife — indeed, as a counsellor and comforter in times of religious trial and despair; as more than one poor soul whom she has since comforted could testify. Her experience in resisting the devil and overcoming these temptations to despair — her subsequent life of established faith and abiding hope, and calm, religious joy, made her an experienced guide to the tempted, a successful counsellor to the doubting and despairing.

And thus her experience here proved itself to be *for others*, as well as for herself. It enabled her personally to help and relieve others. And not only this. It is a sign to the doubting by which they may conquer. It holds out to them the encouragement of seasonable relief, and intimates to them the way of relief. In that terrible "wilderness" of doubt, where she was "tempted of the devil," she purified and consecrated herself against all temptations of that kind thenceforward. As it has been said of the temptations of her Lord and Master, "they were all met in spirit then, and fought and conquered before they came in their reality." And her experience in the art of meeting those temptations, prepared her to meet all other kinds of temptations. For *you*, my people, as well as for herself, she endured this "great fight of afflictions;" that by her experience, by her influence, her prayers, her sympathies, and her counsels, she might, if possible, save you from despair, and restore to you the joys of so great salvation.

This terrible experience with doubts and fears, with the subsequent strict devotional habits and holy

living, and close watching it induced, was her sanctification not only against fatal effects from future trials and temptations; but also against the terrors of that last great trial — *her own death.* Her endurance of the terrors of despair, and her subsequent rising in holy confidence to an abiding and, for the most part, uniform Christian trust, prepared her to contemplate, with more or less confidence of final victory, the terrors of death. It made her watchful and prayerful against the hour, lest, coming suddenly, she should be found sleeping. It made her fervent in spirit and diligent in business; and her conduct for the last few years, and especially the last few months, of her life, practically declared to us, as did her Master to his disciples, "I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work." Her mind, ever inventive to do good, seemed to be quickened to an intenser activity in behalf of others. How industrious and persevering was she in doing what she could, both in temporal and spiritual things, for the benefit of others. How she surprised us by the interest she took in every body; her condescension to the lowest; her charity and sympathy for all, even the vilest; her polite, respectful carriage towards the meanest; — as it is said of Mary Lundie Duncan, whose memoir was one of her closet companions, "her sweet, mild, Christian manner, giving a touching, edifying grace to all she did." God gave her grace to accomplish more, and made her light to burn the more brightly, that it was soon to be extinguished.

Of such a sudden crisis she may not have had

apprehensions; although with regard to the fact that she had not long to live, she seems — from remarks of hers that we now recollect — to have had a presentiment. But it was no cold, gloomy presentiment. She could smile as sweetly, and be as amiable and cheerful, and as interested in our welfare and your welfare, as ever.

I was thinking, but a few days before her death, that I had not been called upon to attend a funeral since the year came in; and I was wondering in my mind who would be called to leave us next? Little did I then apprehend that it would be one from my own dwelling and from my very side. But if one must be taken from our circle, what more merciful selection, in point of fitness, could have been made. She was prepared to go. She had been for years pluming her wings for the upward flight. And although cut off in the midst of her days and in the midst of usefulness; yet, she had lived a useful life and comparatively, when we remember that she had been a professor of religion for the past thirty years, with a consistent and growing piety — a *long* life. And she was willing to go. "Pray that I may have an easy death," she said; but there was no request that she might recover. How hard soever she found it to part from her family, and how glad soever she would have been to have remained for their comfort and my people's good; yet, she was willing to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. "We must part," she said, "but it is all right." Here was, at least, sweet submission — full resignation — yea, even a choice of death and what is beyond to the saint, to life with its sins and imperfections. That choice she

thus expressed in her journal, twenty-two years ago; "Have just now cast myself renewedly on the merits of my dear Redeemer, and there would I hang. I am vile, helpless, polluted with sin. O sin! what hast thou done? It draws down my soul. O when shall I be free!

> 'O glorious hour! O blest abode!
> I shall be near, and like my God!
> And flesh and sin no more control
> The sacred pleasures of the soul.'

Lord, when shall it once be? Enable me so to live, that I may at last enter the portals of heaven, where no more sin will trouble me." She has passed within those portals! She is safe — happy — free from sin, in its guilt, and pollution, and presence, and power, — free from care and sorrow forever!

O that such a death — where the subject of it was so resigned, so composed, so calm in Christian hope, so full of holy fortitude to meet the king of terrors — may prove a devotement *for your sakes.* As an example of the worth and power of experimental religion, inspiring your hearts to a like experience and a like consecration to Christ and to usefulness, may it prove vicarious! O that the spirit of that consecrated life and consecrated death, by your experience of the Christian graces and your imitation of her virtues, may pass into *you*, and sanctify *you* also for such a life and such a death! It says to you, "No man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." Live for others. Die, so as to recommend religion to others.

* God will not chide our human tears
Because her early death appears
A grief to last through coming years.

There was a brightness in her eye
Of one who felt her home was nigh,
Nor feared to live, nor feared to die.

* * * * * * * *

Eyes that gave back all feelings pure,
Pledge that the soul within was sure,
And would unto the end endure.

Lips, in whose easy flexile play
A world of hidden meaning lay;
A smile that cheered like dawn of day.

* * * * * * * *

She bade us lose the world and win,
By casting out each cherished sin,
God's life our secret souls within.

So might we house a gentle guest,
The Comforter, in our lone breast,
And feel e'en here the perfect rest.

Which follows when our will has past
Into our Father's will at last—
A heaven whose calm is ne'er o'ercast.

I saw the funeral wind along,
Preceded by a gathering throng,
One in a grief subdued, but strong

And women's tears fell fast as rain,
And rough men shook with inward pain
For her they ne'er should see again.

* * * * * * * *

* Taken from the beautiful poem written on the anniversary of the death of the Rev. F. W. Robertson, and slightly altered to suit the circumstances.

Rest now beneath the quiet earth,
Thou noble heart of golden worth,
Until thy glorious new birth.

But if a human thrill can move
Thy soul's serenity above,
'T will be the sight of so much love.

Love, called forth by the power that lies
In Christ's sublime self-sacrifice,
Lived out again before our eyes.

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